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11 Nebraska communities will have help developing websites

Eleven Nebraska communities will receive assistance in developing websites to market their community to prospective residents and businesses and provide information to current residents through a new program sponsored by the Nebraska Information Technology Commission (NITC).

"I am pleased more Nebraska communities are making efforts to improve their websites," said Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy, chairman of the NITC. "A community's website acts as its gateway to the world. In addition to helping residents access information and services, an effective website has the potential to showcase a town's quality of life. Information on recreational facilities, medical care, affordable housing, educational opportunities, and other amenities factor into decision making for those interested in relocating. Websites can be valuable marketing tools and we want to help more communities take full advantage of the opportunities this medium provides."

The Developing Websites for Community Growth project provides hands-on assistance to 11 communities, accessibility testing of websites, and marketing assistance. The project is strictly focused on content development, website enhancements, and marketing. At the end of the process, each community will have fully developed website content and will be able to pass that on to a web developer.

Communities were selected based on their readiness, commitment and involvement, history of cooperation and success in community and economic development efforts, and commitment to create a single community Web portal.

The communities selected include:

- ◆ Burwell
- ◆ Butler County
- ◆ Elwood
- ◆ Gering
- ◆ Grand Island
- ◆ Laurel
- ◆ Pender
- ◆ Scribner
- ◆ South Sioux City
- ◆ St. Paul
- ◆ Valentine

Research by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) and University of Nebraska has reinforced the need for a comprehensive community website.

"While print and other media may well remain important to the residential recruitment efforts of communities, the Internet appears to be the single most effective method by which the qualitative aspects of a place or region can be broadly communicated to prospective new residents—especially those with higher education or skill levels," said Randy Cantrell, a rural sociologist with UNL and the Nebraska Rural Initiative. "Effective marketing communication strategies can greatly enhance the value of those Internet resources, simplify the decision making process for potential new residents, and increase the likelihood that new residents will find themselves to be satisfied with the quality of life that is available in their new location."

A detailed manual will be available for all Nebraska communities in December. The manual will guide communities through the process and will include a website content development checklist, best practices, project planning, marketing resources, and hints for utilizing Web 2.0 enhancements.

Project partners include the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, DED, Nebraska Public Power District, AIM Institute, Twin Cities Development - Scottsbluff/Gering, and the NITC Community Council. The Developing Websites for Community Growth project has been funded through a grant from the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Community Technology Fund.